It Was a Very Good Year

Yes indeed, it was a very good year for Philosophy at Stetson. Not only were we celebrating the presence of our new faculty member Melinda Hall, and not only was Josh Rust celebrating his sabbatical this spring by working hard every morning writing philosophy, we had a bumper crop of excellent philosophy majors as well. In fact, in May we graduated nine majors, a record for our department. In the picture our graduates are in the group shot, which also includes, faculty members, Ron, Susan and Melinda. Being on sabbatical, Josh was excused. Allen Love and Andrew Epifanio are in separate pics. But quantity is only part of the story. What was most impressive is the quality of these majors. There is no other way to say it: these students were outstanding. As we would like to think of it, we managed to infect them for life with a love of philosophy. We know that whatever path they finally take in life, it will be guided by the voices of the philosophers to whom they have listened and from whom they have learned. To get a glimpse of this quality, see the article on their senior theses. What a pleasure it has been to work with these fine students.

PHILOSOPHY ON THE MOVE

This summer the Department of Philosophy will move from Davis Hall to the first floor of Elizabeth Hall. This is a great move for us. We will be closer to the Lawson Seminar and Reading Room where we hold many of our seminars. We will also not have to cross Woodland Blvd. We should be settled in by the beginning of the fall semester. Please drop by and see us.

“I am that gadfly which God has attached to the state, and all day long and in all places am always fastening upon you, arousing and persuading and reproaching you.” - Socrates
This spring I took my first sabbatical. In January my neighbor, Ari, asked me—with apparent disbelief—“So when, exactly, do you start teaching again?” September, I said. I tried to explain to him that a sabbatical isn’t an eight month holiday (including summer), but an opportunity to focus on scholarship, which can otherwise easily be crowded out by our extensive teaching and service duties. I’m not sure he believed me.

The title of my dissertation (2004) was “John Searle’s Ideal Type: Rethinking the Construction of Social Reality”. The notion of an “ideal type” is Max Weber’s. This spring I revisited some of those themes, looking at the way in which Weber’s Economy and Society both challenged and amplified John Searle’s work on the structure of social reality. For Searle, every institutional fact is underlain and defined by a cluster of rights and obligations. When playing chess one is under an obligation to move the bishop on the diagonal. If one doesn’t do this one isn’t playing chess. Searle extends this thought to social reality as a whole: if one doesn’t prepare a budget for Congress, deliver the State of the Union Address, etc., there is a sense in which one isn’t the president of the United States. If one doesn’t grade papers (assuming one isn’t on sabbatical!) and prepare essays for publication consideration there is a sense in which one isn’t a professor. Searle concedes that these rights and obligations—what he calls constitutive rules—are often tacit but insists that they are always there:

“A test for the presence of genuine institutional facts is whether or not we could codify the rules explicitly. In the case of many institutional facts, such as property, marriage, and money, these indeed have been codified into explicit laws. Others, such as friendship, dates, and cocktail parties, are not so codified, but they could be” (Searle, CSR, p. 88).

This surprises me and I think it should surprise you. Are there rules of friendship and cocktail parties in the way that there are game-defining rules of chess? What are the obligations of dating such that, if I fail to adhere to them, I’m no longer on a date? We dress up and get a babysitter. I then surprise my wife by taking her to Walmart, am I no longer on a date? (I grant that this is a bad date—but even bad dates are dates). Friendship is perhaps the most troubling of Searle’s examples. To act as a friend seems in some way fundamentally incompatible with the language of rights and obligations (so friendship couldn’t be constituted by them). If I visit a friend in the hospital from an obligation am I even a friend?

It occurred to me that Weber describes whole social and political orders which likewise resist Searle’s picture of social reality as consisting of nested systems of constitutive rules. Consider, for example, Weber’s description of the charismatic leader:

“In its ‘extra-ordinary,’ charismatic authority is sharply opposed to rational, and particularly bureaucratic, authority. ... Bureaucratic authority is specifically rational in the sense of being bound to intellectually analyzable rules; while charismatic authority is specifically irrational in the sense of being foreign to all rules” (Weber, ES, p. 244). In Weber’s terms, it maybe that Searle’s description of social reality is only a description of one kind of social reality—namely, one characterized by bureaucratic authority.

This, in turn, led me to wonder what the charismatic relationship is, exactly. While I don’t think an strict analysis of charisma’s influence is possible, this shouldn’t prevent us from hunting for characteristic features of the relationship. For Weber, a follower’s “recognition is freely given” and “consists in ... absolute trust in the leader” (Weber, ES, p. 244). If Weber is right, a disciple is just cowed by a leader; this isn’t a matter of brainwashing, as when a follower of Charles Manson said, “I became Charlie. Everything I once was, was Charlie. There was nothing left of me anymore. And all of the people in the Family, there’s nothing left of them anymore, they’re all Charlie too” (Bugliosi 1994, 461). What is, then, the nature of this absolute trust that the follower freely places in the hands of the leader? I distinguish trusting in from trusting with and suggest that where we can trust another with a pre-existing life-defining project (say, trusting a school with Quinn and Brynn’s education), I trust in someone when I freely give them the latitude to determine, for me, the very nature of those life-defining projects. I’m not sure if I’m correct about this but I’ve enjoyed the investigation!
SENIOR THESES

Anthony Collier: “America’s ‘Racial Democracy’: Has the United States Found a Way to discriminate in the ‘Age of Colorblindness’?”

Andrew Epifanio: Senior Paper title is “The Limits of Responsibility”. Honors: Phi Eta Sigma; Psi Chi; Omicron Delta Kappa
Future plans: Plans to take a gap year to participate in the City Year Education Project, then pursuing graduate studies.

Austin Fuller: Senior Paper title is “Portraits of Life: Soren Kierkegaard’s Modalities in Henry James “The Portrait of a Lady”.
Austin graduated in December and is currently a Reporter at the Daily Commercial newspaper in Leesburg, Fl.


Jose Morera: “A Theory of Distributive Justice”.

Matthew Lebron: Senior Paper title is “Ethical Theory, Moral Discourse, and the Struggle for Moral Knowledge”.
Honors: Phi Eta Sigma; Omicron Delta Kappa; Phi Beta Kappa; Psi Chi, Suma Cum Laude.
Ronald L. and Margaret Smith Hall Award
He will attending the Master’s Program at University of Florida for his graduate studies in Philosophy beginning Fall 2014.

Allen Love: “Two Concepts of Reason in the Philosophy of Marcuse”. Allen will take a gap year and plans to go to Vanderbilt Law School.

Marquis Wimberly: “Conversation, Community and Individuality...” Marquis plans to attend graduate school in Communication Studies; he has an offer from Johns Hopkins and is considering other offers.

On November 15th and 16th, the department hosted the 59th annual conference of the Florida Philosophical Association. Joshua Rust and Ron Hall were site coordinators, with important assists from philosophy majors, while Susan Peppers-Bates and Melinda Hall presented papers. Dr. Peppers-Bates presented “Doubly Other: Black Women, Social Death, & the Genocidal American Prison Nation” on black women and American prisons and Dr. Hall presented “Reciprocity and Trope: A Response to Christie Hartley’s Inclusive Contractualism” on liberalism and disability. Ron and Maggi Hall hosted a spirited reception at their home prior to the conference banquet and keynote address. The keynote, given by outgoing FPA President Scott Kimbrough, was entitled “Humanizing Naturalism” and was a highly provocative commentary on a highly influential area of philosophical research – naturalism – and its dour reputation. Perhaps the best part of the conference was the heavy attendance at the keynote and at the other papers by Stetson’s philosophy students—we are sure conference attendees, who flew and drove in from all over the state, were impressed by the turnout! President Kimbrough’s presentation and the many other conference papers provided fodder for debate both at the faculty’s Tuesday coffees and in classrooms. Besides the many papers given, the conference also involved a Teaching Symposium on Open Educational Resources and a Book Symposium on Nancy Stanlick’s American Philosophy: The Basics. Finally, there was a Panel on Diversity in the Discipline which included Brook Sadler, past president of the FPA. Congratulations to the department for pulling off this successful event.
Philosophy Club in Fall 2014

For the upcoming Fall 2014 Semester, the Philosophy Club will convene for its regular meetings five times. We will have a short, introductory meeting at the beginning of the semester, then three longer meetings discussing issues that matter to the faculty and students in the Stetson community, and wrap things up with a casual mixer at the end of the semester. With the main meetings, some number of professors, faculty, or guest speakers will lead group discussion on a focused topic. You may be thinking, this is the same plan as years past! And you’d be right. But, in addition to our normal routine, I’d also like to encourage cooperation between our humble organization and other campus groups that strive to foster knowledge and appreciation for a specific discipline, such as the Science Cafés or events at the Hand Art Center. Lastly, I believe one does not find philosophy, philosophy finds them, and it is often the case that one conversation, one course is all it takes to start a lifelong love affair with philosophy. It is our duty as contributors to the philosophical discourse to encourage these would-be Socrates to question everything, think critically, and act ethically. While our regularly scheduled meetings do a great job of this, meeting only once a month does not give our new thinkers enough time to really find the ins and outs of a new interest, and not everyone has the luxury (or excellent taste and foresight) to major or minor in philosophy. To remedy this, I propose we, the students, meet slightly more regularly, perhaps weekly or every other week, not only to assist others in starting their philosophical journey, but also to critically engage our views amongst ourselves in a setting less formal than a classroom, but more organized than bumping into each other in the quad, though I hope to encourage discussion via bumping into as well. I look forward to seeing you all (hopefully even more often) this semester!"


Evolution or Intelligent Design

Ronald Hall

Soft Evolutionary Theory

- The earth is very old (several billion years old) and there has been organic life on the earth for a billion years or more.
- Many ancient forms of life have disappeared and new forms have come into existence.
- The new forms of life came from previous living forms and were generated largely, if not completely, by the forces of chance (randomness) and causal necessity.
- While there is no evidence (as of yet) that there is any intrinsic design in natural processes, it may turn out that teleological laws are also at work.
- It is an open question as to how the universe began.

Soft Intelligent Design

- Given the finely-tuned conditions that were required for the emergence of life on this planet (just the right distance from the sun, just the right atmospheric conditions, etc.), it is likely that there are some elements of design (along with chance and necessity) embedded in natural processes.
- Fine-tuning may imply the existence of a designer. (The argument from Design is not unreasonable.)

Bloated Evolutionary Theory

- The whole evolutionary process is driven entirely by the forces of chance and causal necessity.
- Fine tuning does not require a designer because, given the vastness of the universe, it was likely that the precise conditions required for the emergence of life would arise by chance and necessity alone.
- God: Evolution has no need for this hypothesis.

Bloated Intelligent Design

- The earth is only a few thousand years old.
- The argument from design is the only reasonable explanation for how the conditions on earth were sufficiently fine-tuned so that life could exist. Fine-tuning proves that a designer (God) exists.
- God: We cannot make sense of things without this hypothesis.
Stetson Showcase is a celebration of achievement whose aim is to foster an appreciation for academic excellence at Stetson University. Student presenters share their research through presentations, portfolios, posters, readings, music and theater performances, art shows, and multimedia work. They present their programs in professional settings for audiences that include judges, faculty, fellow students and interested members of the community.

Stetson Showcase has been known by many names through the years, but its focus on academic quality has remained constant.

The program debuted in 1999 with the name Undergraduate Scholarship and Performance Day (USAPD). It then became known as Undergraduate Scholarship Day (SURCAS) until 2011, when the name was changed to Stetson Showcase. By any name, it’s designed to foster an appreciation for academic achievements at Stetson University. Student presenters share their research, projects, portfolios and performances with the Stetson University community. Projects have included research papers, posters, music and theater performances, and multimedia work.

The judging panel is comprised of a diverse group of individuals who are experts in their fields. To reflect the liberal arts environment of Stetson University and the many areas of student research study, the judging panel is comprised of individuals who can appreciate the work completed in this environment. Judges ask insightful questions about each diverse project and interact with the student presenter to learn more about the subject area and allow the student to show expertise. While many Stetson University students have the opportunity to present their scholarly work at professional meetings across the country, Stetson Showcase provides an additional opportunity for them to display their work to faculty, fellow students and interested members of the wider community. The event is constructed like an interdisciplinary professional conference. All students and faculty are invited to attend the presentations/performances.

We had four philosophy majors who participated in Showcase. They are as follows:

Title: Conversation, Community and Individuality
Author: Marquis Wimberly
Advisor: Dr. R. Hall

Abstract: In America, a pervasive and perhaps uncritically accepted assumption is that the individual and the community exist in an inverse relationship. I challenge this assumption. I argue that genuine conversation and speaking in our own voice has the effect of building individuality and community without sacrificing either. Through an analysis of Robert Bellah’s Habits of the Heart, this research aims to demonstrate the ways in which the perception that there is inverse relation between the community and individual, as presented under communitarian and individualist frameworks, may lead to undesirable effects and suggests that the conversational model can reverse these effects.
HALL AWARD

The Department proudly presented the 2014 Ronald L. and Margaret S Hall Philosophy Award to Matthew Lebron. As already mentioned, this year we had a great class of philosophy majors. So our decision was a difficult one. But Matt was clearly outstanding among the outstanding. Our hearty congratulations go to him for.

ALUMNI UPDATES

Shannon Abelson, Virginia Tech. Things have been quite busy at Tech. I’m currently starting the first draft of my master’s thesis, which will be a critical study of the relationship between experimental philosophy and ordinary language philosophy. I’m also the co-president of the Graduate Philosophy Club and am planning our graduate conference that will take place next term. I have had the opportunity to TA for two undergraduate courses, which is one of my favorite parts of being a grad student. Graduate school has proven to be just as exciting as I imagined!

Anders Brent, University of Minnesota. I have just finished my first year of grad school in the Classics PhD program at the University of Minnesota. Right now, I plan on focusing on ancient philosophy, specifically Plato. I presented a paper entitled “Motivations and Methods: a Unified Socratic Method in the Apology, Gorgias, and Euthyphro” at a small conference at UM. I’m enjoying it, but it’s a lot of work.

Amanda McMullen, University of Miami. Next semester (my final semester of coursework), I will in my third year of graduate school at the University of Miami. Over the past year, my personal research interests have been almost primarily in the philosophy of mind, and in particular, on cognition, consciousness (even more specifically, the tenability of adverbial accounts), and the language-consciousness interface. As well, I’m very excited to be teaching my first course in the history of philosophy, namely, the history of ancient Greek philosophy.

Philosophy Club news

This year the Philosophy Club was led by President Joel Mateo, with assistance from Vice President Allen Love. The group held lively monthly discussions, often on topics which the students suggested. We teamed up the Marchmen Group and sponsored a discussion (with the help of Dr. Rust and Dr. Sapp) entitled, “Law in Liberal Learning,” featuring Professor Robert Bickel from the Stetson University College of Law. We also teamed up with American Studies Professor Paul Croce, who aided us in arranging a guest speaker for the club. The speaker was Barbara Loerzer, a Philosophy PhD candidate and German High School teacher who has come to the US from Germany. We discussed an article she has published on William James and Aesthetics. Dr. Susan Peppers-Bates led a discussion on a recent NY Times Opinion article "Is the United States a
Senior Honors Banquet

Matthew Lebron – Senior Paper title is “Ethical Theory, Moral Discourse, and the Struggle for Moral Knowledge”. Honors: Phi Eta Sigma; Omicron Delta Kappa; Phi Beta Kappa; Psi Chi, Suma Cum Laude. Ronald L. and Margaret Smith Hall Award
Future Plans: He will attending the Master’s Program at University of Florida for his graduate studies in Philosophy beginning Fall 2014.

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Austin Fuller – Senior Paper title is “Portraits of Life: Soren Kierkegaard’s Modalities in Henry James “The Portrait of a Lady”.
Austin graduated in December and is currently a Reporter at the Daily Commercial newspaper in Leesburg, Fl.
Ronald Hall: I continue to serve as the Editor-in-Chief for the *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*. In June I presented a paper “Dethroning Epistemology” at a conference at Yale on the Primacy of Persons.

Susan Peppers-Bates: I had a good year, though juggling work and two energetic and creative young daughters (Anne-Marie and Sophia) keeps me super busy. I presented a paper at the fall Florida Philosophical Association meeting Stetson hosted. Dr. Rust and I also presented on our paper in progress on race and place at an interdisciplinary conference at University of South Florida and at Stetson’s Democracy and Human Rights conference. I am having fun teaching Gender Studies 100 in summer school and will start preparing my sabbatical application for fall 2015. It is hard to believe that I have been at Stetson 14 years.

Joshua Rust: I took my first sabbatical this year! Yeah! See page 2 for more details. Eric Schwitzgebel and I published “The moral behavior of ethics professors: Relationships among self-reported behavior, expressed normative attitude, and directly observed behavior” in *Philosophical Psychology*. Quinn turned one and Brynn turned three!

Melinda Hall: This year, I presented ongoing research at the APA (Eastern Division), the Florida Philosophical Association, and the Kristeva Circle, and guest lectured at Vanderbilt University. I also gave a public lecture for the “Philosophy on the Edge” series at Lewis University. This lecture, “Monstrous Villains and Horrible Heroes: Images of Disability in Horror,” drew more than 100 people. That material launched a successful grant proposal for the Stetson summer grant program. I also had the pleasure of seeing “Vile Sovereigns in Bioethical Debate” published in the *Disability Studies Quarterly*.

Scholars in Residence:

Sylvia Walsh Perkins and Robert L. Perkins: Enjoying Retirement and continue to participate in Departmental functions.